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CALIFORNIA'S ADULT SMOKING DECLINES TO HISTORIC LOWS

SACRAMENTO - Smoking by California adults dropped to 16.2 percent last year, a record low, State Health Director Sandra Shewry announced today in observance of World No Tobacco Day, May 31. Adult smoking has dropped 12 percent since 1998, when the rate measured 18.4 percent.

"The continuing decline of smoking in California is one of the state's great public health achievements," Shewry said. "However, our success is tempered by the fact that those of lower socioeconomic status continue to smoke at rates that are substantially higher than other groups."

In California, the prevalence of smoking is 22.1 percent among those with low socioeconomic status. In contrast, the prevalence of smoking is 7.7 percent among those with high socioeconomic status. Men with low socioeconomic status have the highest smoking prevalence, 27.2 percent.

"The state's comprehensive approach to tobacco education and cessation activities has proven highly effective," said Kimberly Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. "By tackling tobacco cessation through many channels – policy development, outreach and education and offering cessation services – a more informed public has made the healthy choice of not smoking."

According to the World Health Organization, low-income individuals tend to use tobacco products more than people with higher levels of income and education. Tobacco use can also cause increased illnesses, making smokers less productive, and can kill individuals at the height of their productivity, depriving families of their breadwinners. Limited family resources spent on tobacco products and medical expenses also mean less money left for food and other basic needs.

"Tobacco addiction causes devastating emotional and medical consequences as well as serious financial hardships for lower socioeconomic groups," said Dian Kiser, director of RESPECT, a new statewide project to reduce smoking among individuals with low socioeconomic status.

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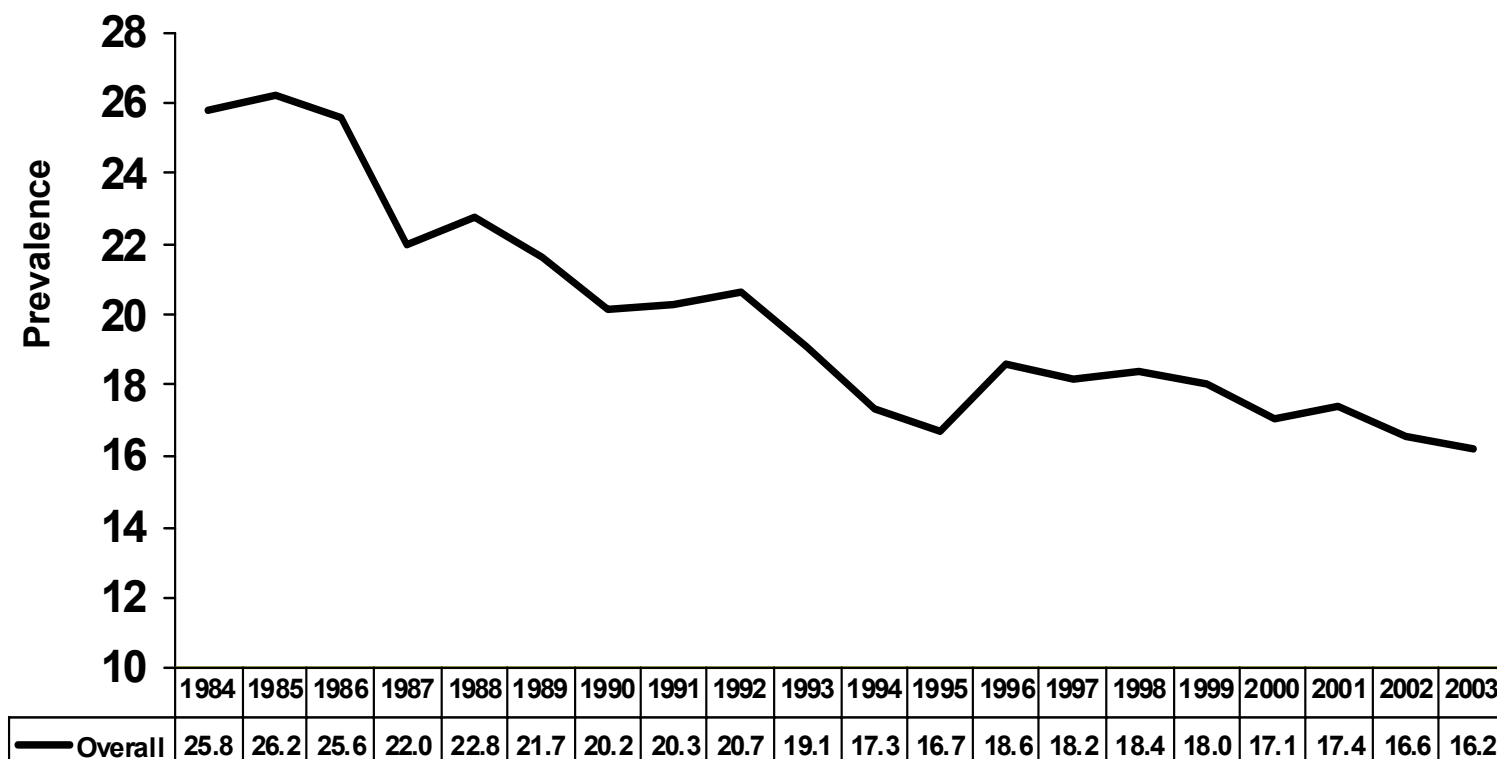
This year alone, more than 43,000 people in California will prematurely die from a tobacco-related disease. In addition, the cost of smoking in California is nearly \$16 billion annually, or \$3,331 per smoker every year, according to a report released in 2002 by the Institute for Health and Aging at the University of California, San Francisco.

World No Tobacco Day is celebrated annually on May 31 in communities and countries throughout the world. It is designed to inform the public about the dangers of tobacco, the tobacco industry's business practices and what needs to be done to protect the health of future generations. This year's theme is "Tobacco and Poverty – the Vicious Circle."

Californians who want more information on tobacco cessation and prevention can visit TobaccoFreeCA.com, an informational and interactive Web site that provides support and tools to help break the addiction to tobacco. For free and confidential telephone counseling, Californians can also call the California Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-NO-BUTTS.



Smoking prevalence among California adults, 1984-2003



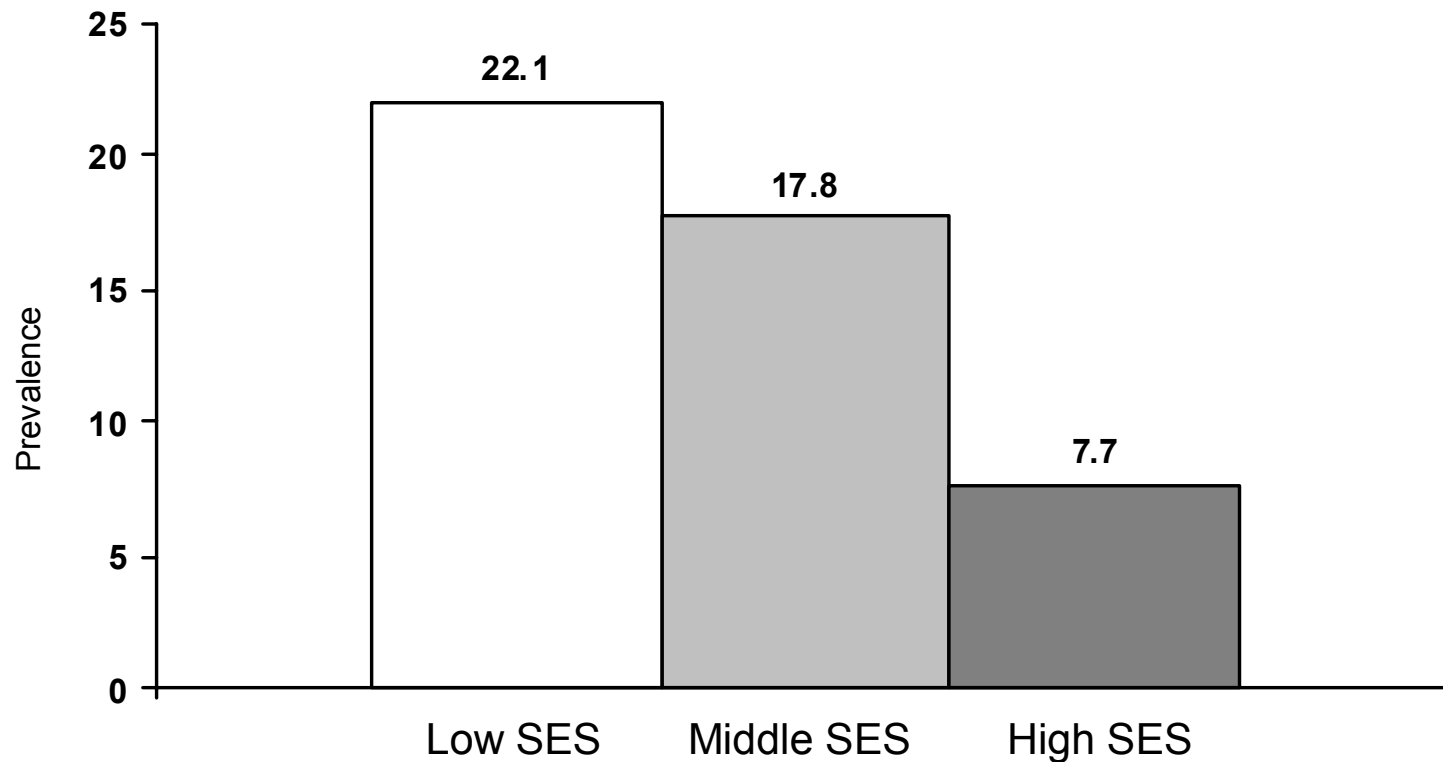
Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 1984-1992, BRFSS and California Adult Tobacco Survey data are combined for 1993-2003. The data are weighted to the 1990 California population.

Note change of smoking definition in 1996 that included more occasional smokers.

Prepared by: California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section, March 2004.



Adult smoking prevalence in California by socioeconomic status, 2003



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and California Adult Tobacco Survey data are combined for 1994-2003.

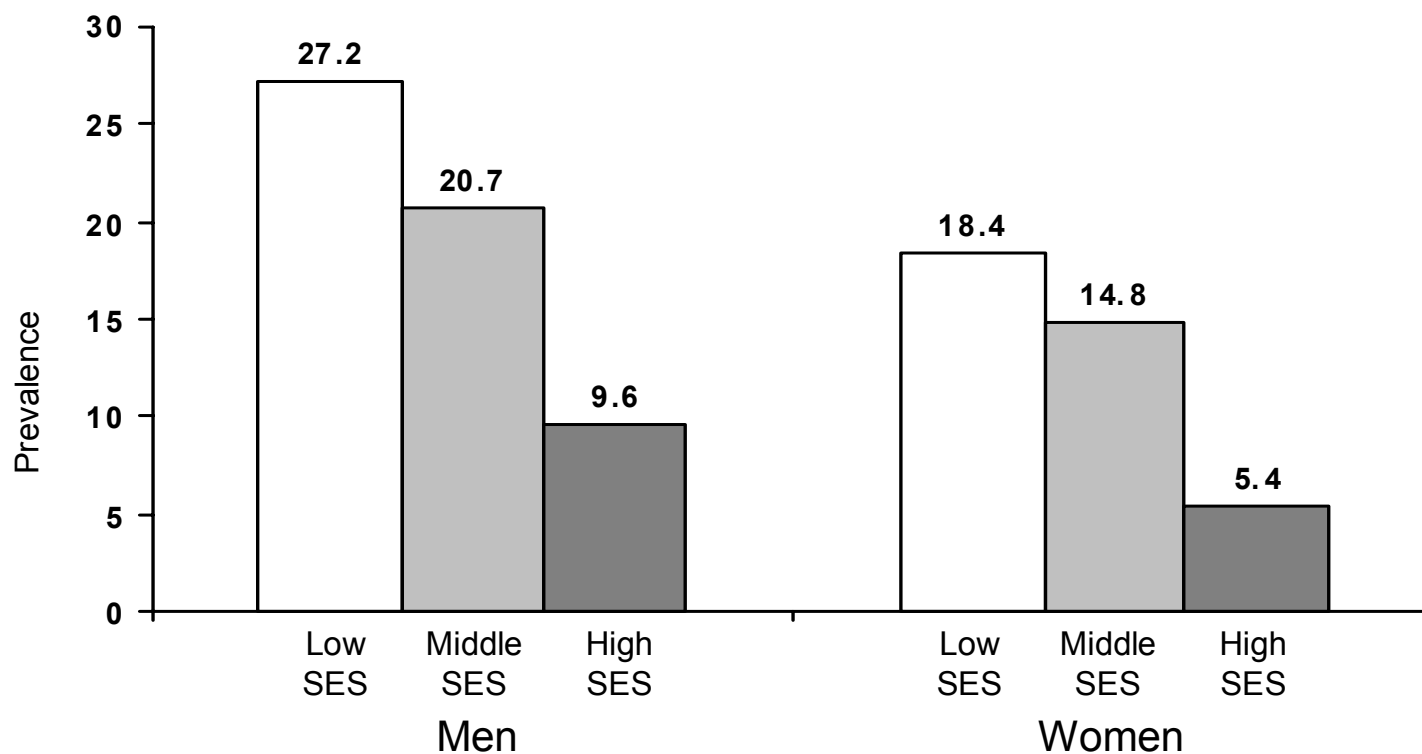
The data are weighted to the 1990 California population.

Note Low SES is defined as household income less than \$25,000 and highest educational status is some college. High SES is defined as household income of more than \$50,000 and educational status is college undergraduate degree or more.

Prepared by: California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section, March 2004.



Adult smoking prevalence in California by socioeconomic status and gender, 2003



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and California Adult Tobacco Survey data are combined for 1994-2003. The data are weighted to the 1990 California population.

Note Low SES is defined as household income less than \$25,000 and highest educational status is some college. High SES is defined as household income of more than \$50,000 and educational status is college undergraduate degree or more.

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